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SUBJECT: CENI PRESIDENT'S VIEWS ON CNDD AND ELECTORAL
PROCESS

REF: CONAKRY 379

¶1. Summary: The President of the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) discussed election process challenges, the role of the international community, and the CNDD in the context of proposed 2009 elections. CENI President suggested that elections are being deliberately delayed by the CNDD to amass wealth and influence before forfeiting power. End Summary.

¶2. Prior to a ceremony on June 25 in which DCM presented USD 2.75 million in election support and humanitarian assistance, USAID LES informally discussed election challenges with CENI President Ben Sekou Sylla, a synopsis of which is provided below. Sylla cited the CNDD's lack of political will and financial resources as the major challenges impeding elections in 2009. He insisted that if the political will existed, financial support could have been mobilized long ago.

Background on Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI)

¶3. The CENI, an independent body, was established in 2007 by former President Lansana Conte to organize and oversee elections. After Conte's death and the subsequent coup d'etat in December 2008, junta leader Mousa Dadis Camara enhanced the CENI's mandate to include power to solicit funds from the international community. These funds would be available for all costs related to election implementation.

¶4. During the meeting with USAID LES, which included the DCM and acting USAID Director, Sylla accused the CNDD of stalling and taking advantage of election delays. He claimed election interference by the CNDD allows continuous embezzlement of public funds. "They want to fill their pockets up before leaving power," he said.

¶5. Sylla emphasized that the International Contact Group has the political stature to pressure the junta into respecting the election timeline. He stressed that the Contact Group should force the CNDD to institute democratic elections. Sylla believed that while internal pressure from political figures outside the CNDD might have some influence, the CNDD is more likely to respond to the international community.

CENI capable of implementing elections

¶6. When asked whether the CENI was capable of effectively organizing and overseeing elections, Sylla's response was yes, and that "it is an empty debate." Sylla said that CENI does not actually perform the ground work, but has hired trained technicians for the elections. He assured USAID LES that registration fraud was "impossible," and that the job would be done properly. Sylla also mentioned that recalling

current CENI members now would provide the CNDD with another pretense to delay elections, and that additional delays could possibly result in serious civil unrest.

17. Comment: Sylla's comment that the international contact group could sway the CNDD was apparently accurate. Shortly after the contact group issued a stern communique on elections June 27 after meeting in Sirte, Libya (reftel), Dadis granted the CNDD 15 billion GNF (approximately \$3.2 million USD) (septel). Even if this grant actually comes through, the road to elections remains long and problematic. End Comment.

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